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Transitional Homes For Homeless Veterans

Oxford House, Inc.

A FEASIBILITY STUDY OF TRANSITIONAL, INDEPENDENT HOUSES FOR NEWLY EMPLOYED HOMELESS VETERANS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oxford House is a working model of a self-supporting, self-run alcohol and drug recovery program that has grown from one to 14 houses since 1975. The houses work for all ages, for all races, for those from all social and economic backgrounds, for men and for women, for those who have been homeless and for those who haven't, for those with many achievements in the past and for those who have none, for veterans and non-veterans, for those who used alcohol exclusively, for those addicted only to drugs, and for those addicted to both alcohol and drugs.

With houses functioning smoothly with residents drawn from such a broad base, it would defy logic to suggest that veterans with alcohol and drug problems who have been homeless can't successfully operate Oxford Houses or Oxford House-type houses. Oxford House residents who are veterans believe that military service has probably made them better able to acclimate to group living. For those without alcohol and drug problems, having been both veterans and homeless may serve as a common bond to unite houses so they can function successfully, but that remains to be proven by the first groups of homeless veterans who try it.

Many research papers clearly indicate the need for low-cost housing if the homeless are to get re-established. Likewise, research shows that many homeless alcoholics and drug abusers, especially those who have no families or have alienated their families, need long-term stays in an environment free from alcohol and drugs if they are to stay sober and become resocialized.

This study recommends that transitional housing for those with alcohol and drug addiction be separate from housing for the non-addicted. Those with addictions would apply to Oxford House, Inc. for a charter, a method of operation and quality control that has been proven for over 12 years. A separate organization would be created to provide charters for the non-addicted and to be responsible for quality control.

The experiences of the 14 Oxford Houses, and especially those of the three Oxford Houses examined in detail in this study, give every indication that homeless veterans can successfully operate Oxford Houses. The house in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for instance, was begun by veterans who had been through a Veterans Administration hospital and had no home to which to return. A survey of Oxford House residents in the Spring this year shows that 45 percent of the respondents are veterans and 39 percent have been homeless. Veterans and

veterans who have been homeless are already instrumental in operating Oxford Houses.

The examination in detail of three Oxford Houses is a graphic case study of alcoholics and drug addicts who, when given a working model for operating a house and responsibility to make it work, have successfully managed houses on their own and in the process become resocialized, employed and have gained self-respect and self-confidence.

After they are on their feet, all Oxford Houses are totally self-supporting and operate without a professional staff. The impetus for recovery comes from Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous and the support that is inherent in a house where the peer pressure is to help one another and stay sober.

Oxford House is readily expandable anywhere. The Bethlehem house residents learned most of what they know about Oxford House from reading the Oxford House Manual. It took only minimal monitoring by the Washington houses.

There has probably never been a lower cost method of recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction or to house the homeless. It will cost states, cities and counties or their contractors, about $5,000 per house to lease and furnish an Oxford House or Oxford House-type house and pay the first month's rent and a security deposit. Once operating, it will be self-governing and self-supporting for many years. Oxford House residents in the Washington, D.C. area took such pride in what they had created that they undertook expansion on their own with no outside financial support. The same thing could well happen in other cities.